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INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS TO RESUME FROM MARCH 27

Following a decline in coronavirus cases in India, the aviation ministry has decided to restart them after a two-year hiatus

OPENING BORDERS FOR FOREIGN TOURISTS

The ministry clarified that international operations will be subject to strict adherence to Union health ministry's Covid-19 guidelines that were issued on February 10. Industry players welcomed the move. "This will provide impetus to the economic recovery for the aviation sector and the nation, with borders opening for tourists," said IndiGo CEO Ronojoy Dutta

AIR BUBBLE ARRANGEMENTS TO END

- Scheduled international flight services have remained suspended in India since March 23, 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic
- However, special international flights have been operating between India and 37 countries since July 2020 under air bubble arrangements, which will also stand revoked after March 27 | P13

3,993

FRESH COVID CASES ONLY IN INDIA ON TUESDAY, THE LOWEST IN 662 DAYS

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu inaugurates the ThinkEdu Conclave 2022, in Chennai on Tuesday. Also seen are *TNIE* editorial director Prabhu Chawla, CMD Manoj Kumar Sonthalia, MSME minister TM Anbarasan, and *TNIE* CEO Lakshmi Menon | P MAHADEVAN

DIGITAL DIVIDE MUST BE MINIMISED: VICE-PRESIDENT

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Chennai

THE 10th edition of *TNIE*'s ThinkEdu Conclave got off to a flying start on Tuesday, with Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu urging State governments to implement the National Education Policy in letter and spirit, and advocating for education in one's mother tongue to be promoted. "First and basic learning should be in one's mother tongue. Local language is like eyesight and other languages are like spectacles," he remarked.

With the pandemic disrupting the education sector and forcing teachers, students, and parents to quickly adapt to online media, educators must be recognised for their flexibility and commitment, Naidu said. However, the digital divide must be minimised, he added.

The day was also packed with other stalwarts who spoke at length about the state of education in India. Rajya Sabha MP Subramanian Swamy in his session 'The Chinese Model: Can India Catch Up?' answered that question with a cheeky, yet confident, "I would like to overtake China." He discussed a multitude of other topics with senior journalist Kaveree Bamzai. Congress MP Shashi Tharoor spoke about the shortage of medical seats, revision of History textbooks and his experience of Hinduism vs Hindutva. Delhi's Deputy CM, Manish Sisodia, TN Higher Education Minister K Ponmudy, and Karnataka Higher Education Minister Dr Ashwathnarayan CN discussed plans for better education.

Over 200 participants joined each session online, besides over 215 students and 150 delegates in person on Day One at ITC Grand Chola. **More on: P16**

PM'S MESSAGE

I am delighted to learn about the tenth edition of ThinkEdu, the annual Education Conclave of *The New Indian Express*. The theme of the conclave - "Remaking India, Asserting Bharat" is admirable.

Education aids in personality building and character development. Our focus is on universalisation of quality education. Through policy-based and participation-based approach, our indefatigable efforts have focused on transforming the education sector.

Our education reforms are in tune with national values and national goals. Through inclusive education, our vision is to empower our youth and make them future-ready.

Digital technology has enabled holding of regular classes during the pandemic. Measures like e-Vidya, One Class One Channel and digital labs are creating an education infrastructure which will go a long way in helping the youth of the country. The National Digital University, announced in this year's Union Budget, is another innovative step aimed at ensuring access to high-quality higher education.

As we celebrate Amrit Mahotsav of our independence, we are tireless in our efforts to make the nation self-reliant in every sector. The mantra of new India is - 'Compete and Conquer'.

The theme of the conclave reflects our commitment to take India to newer heights of excellence. The collective brainstorming by the gathering of students, academics, professionals and students at the conclave will lead to a practical roadmap to further expand and strengthen the education sector.

Best wishes for all success of the tenth edition of ThinkEdu.

- Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

> *Before learning any language, we should learn our mother tongue... there should be no opposition to, or imposition of, other languages* - **Venkaiah Naidu, Vice-President**

Indians moved out of Sumy amid ceasefire

The US, UK and EU contemplate ban on Russian oil imports

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

ALL Indians who were stranded in Sumy near the Russian border were moved to Poltava in central Ukraine on Tuesday as Russia held on to its promise of a ceasefire. "They are currently en route to Poltava, from where they will board trains to western Ukraine. Flights under Operation Ganga are being prepared to bring them back home," said Arindam Bagchi, spokesperson, Ministry of External Affairs.

While the development is a big relief for India, Russia seems headed for more international sanctions with the US, UK and the European Union contemplating a ban on Russian oil imports. The coordinated measures are meant to deal a heavy blow to Russia's economy, which depends on energy exports. However, it will have ramifications beyond Russia. Reacting sharply to the news, Russia's deputy PM Alexander Novak said a "rejection of Russian oil would lead to catastrophic consequences for the global market", causing prices to touch $300 a barrel. Russia has also threatened to close its main gas pipeline to Germany.

Indian students stranded in Sumy on their way to Poltava on Tuesday | PTI

Tuesday's evacuation comes a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a lengthy telephonic conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Russia later announced ceasefire in Kyiv, Chernigov, Sumy, Kharkov and Mariupol, paving the way for Ukrainian authorities to begin evacuating civilians stranded in those areas.

Earlier, efforts were on to rescue those stranded in Sumy through a humanitarian corridor leading to Russia, but Ukraine rejected the idea.

According to the UN, the war has killed 474 civilians. **P9, 12**

Shell to shut Russia ops

British energy giant Shell said on Tuesday that it will stop buying Russian oil and natural gas, and shut down its service stations and other operations in the country

17k Indians back home

India has brought back over 17,100 of its nationals from Ukraine so far in over 75 evacuation flights that have landed in Mumbai and Delhi, according to the MEA

'No tie-up with Russia'

The European Organization for Nuclear Research said it will not enter into new collaborations with Russian scientific institutions until further notice

Centre may intervene to tackle fuel price rise, says Nirmala

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

THE Union Government, which is concerned about the rising crude oil prices in the international market owing to the Russia-Ukraine war, may make use of budgetary provisions to tackle the situation. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said that since the spike in crude oil prices will have a bearing on fuel prices in the country, the government will look at ways to cushion the impact.

"Since we import over 85-90 per cent of crude oil, the rise in price is a matter of concern, but alternative sources will also be considered. We are watching the situation closely as to how it pans out. I am conscious about it," she told a select audience during an interactive session on 'Atma Nirbhar Indian Economy', organised by the BJP. The minister hinted at compensating Indian oil companies for the price hike to ensure that consumers do not feel the pinch.

On the Ukraine crisis, Nirmala Sitharaman, while observing that it has posed a lot of challenges, also felt that it has thrown opportunities for countries like India which had seen an increase in wheat export.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at an event in Bengaluru on Tuesday | ASHISHKRISHNA HP

Even during the Covid-19 pandemic situation, the country, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, took the opportunity to push the 'Atma Nirbhar' mantra, as over five crore PPE kits were manufactured, one vaccine was developed indigenously and put at the disposal of the world. "The CoWin application was also a contribution to the world, which means the PM's Atma Nirbhar is not just for me and you, but for global welfare", she remarked.

CONTINUED ON: P4

'The middle class is everywhere'

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman asserted that her budget had addressed the concerns of the 'middle class in every sector'. When a participant at an interactive session asked what her budget meant for the middle class, especially as there was no difference in the taxation slabs, she replied, "People will never be happy with what I say, because they want 'a particular answer' and I don't give that. I see the middle class in farmers, those in informal jobs, doing their own business and taking loans from banks, those who want to send their children to study abroad and send money. I also see the middle class in startups looking at the government to support them. So, I will see the middle class everywhere," evoking a huge round of applause.

FINDING SOLUTION

All-party meeting soon to discuss Mekedatu: CM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

CHIEF Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Tuesday said that an all-party meeting will be convened next week to discuss the Mekedatu project. He also expressed confidence in getting the necessary environmental clearance from the authorities concerned.

Speaking in the Assembly, the CM said, "I will invite legal experts and leaders from all parties. We will take their opinion and suggestions and work accordingly." He also said that he is personally tracking the issue of environment clearance for the project, "It is before the Union Environment ministry. We have urged them to clear it and I will get it done during my visit to Delhi. Once that is done, we will have to get the Detailed Project Report approved. The case before the Green Tribunal, which was quashed, is now before the Supreme Court," he added.

Bommai said he has already spoken to legal experts twice. "Our stand is clear. Our responsibility is to give water allocated to Tamil Nadu, which we release. We need to discuss about the remaining quantum of water and start the project work at the earliest."

Opposition leader Siddaramaiah said Tamil Nadu is politicising the issue and added that it has no right to stop the project.

CONTINUED ON: P4

GOA
ELECTION DRAMA

Both the BJP and Congress may be looking to poach each other's legislators to achieve the magic number of 21 and form the government in the coastal state | **P4,10**

EXPRESS READ

No 'compulsory language' in NEP, Centre tells HC

BENGALURU: The Centre on Tuesday cleared its stand before the Karnataka High Court that there is no mention of any compulsion of language in National Education Policy-2020, adding that there is no need for re-articulation of provisions | **P5**

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MOON MISSION

Chandrayaan-2 observes Argon-40 in lunar exosphere

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

A payload on board India's second moon-orbiting mission Chandrayaan-2 has made a first-of-its-kind discovery on the distribution of one of the noble gases, Argon-40, to study the lunar exosphere as well as the surface from where this gas is understood to have escaped.

The finding is significant considering manned lunar missions are being planned by countries like the USA to set up human bases on the Moon — a mission currently scheduled for 2025 — and there is an increased interest in studying the lunar surface and its atmosphere, the exosphere being the topmost of its layers.

The Chandra's Atmospheric Composition Explorer-2 (CHACE-2), a quadrupole mass spectrometer on Chandrayaan-2 mission made the observations to provide an insight into the dynamics of the lunar exosphere, and on activities of gases emerging through radioactive decay in the first few tens of metres below the lunar surface, India's premier space agency, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said on Tuesday.

Noble gases serve as important tracers to understand the processes of surface-exosphere interaction, and Argon-40 (Ar-40) is an important tracer atom to study the dynamics of the lunar exosphere.

Ar-40 originates from the radioactive decay of Potassium-40 (K-40) present below the lunar surface.

Once formed, it diffuses through the inter-granular space in the lunar surface dust and makes its way up to the lunar exosphere through seepage and faults.

The CHACE-2 observations provide details on the spatial variations in Ar-40 through the lunar day covering the equatorial and mid-latitude regions of the Moon.

The importance of Chandrayaan-2's CHACE-2 observations is that although NASA's Apollo-17 (the last of the manned lunar mission carried out in 1972) and Lunar Atmosphere and Dust Environment Explorer (LADEE) — a robotic mission that orbited the Moon and impacted its surface on April 17, 2014, to gather information on lunar atmosphere and determine whether dust is lofted into the lunar sky — detected the presence of Ar-40 in the lunar exosphere, the measurements were confined to the near-equatorial region of the Moon. **P5**